

Haggai #3: From This Day On (Haggai 2:10-23)

PRAY

Has God been trying to get your attention lately? Have you been paying attention?
Maybe he's been trying to convict you about something you need to repent of
Maybe he's been trying to encourage you in the midst of some hard stuff of life
Or maybe he's just wanting to overwhelm you and put you in awe of his grace
God may be using any number of means to try to get your attention... But I hope you're listening
Your well-being, your happiness, your holiness, or your life may just depend on it

I invite you to **TURN** to the book of Haggai once more, and Haggai chapter 2, [page #791]
As we wrap up our short and sweet look at this old prophetic book
In our first two messages from Haggai, he called the Jewish people of his day to action
They'd gotten busy with their own affairs, focusing on their own personal pursuits
Instead of working to finish rebuilding the Lord's temple in Jerusalem
So in chapter 1, Haggai told them God's glory really had to come first in their hearts and lives
And in the first part of chapter 2, the Lord sought to strengthen, motivate, and encourage them
That brings us to the final portion of the book, which came about 2 months later: **READ v.10¹**
Haggai actually received 2 messages to deliver on this same day
The first to the priests, and the second to the governor

[tr] And what we will take away today are three key truths about God's grace
Even though the word 'grace' is never used here, it's very much present throughout
I believe we can never meditate too much on the grace of God toward sinners like us
That's really the first thing we'll see: that it is grace toward sinful people... I put it this way:

God's grace is undeserved, for we are unholy (v.10-14)

[r] Grace is undeserved, for we are unholy people... Yet it's so, so needed

Look how the Lord has Haggai make this point: **READ v.11²**
So he's basically consulting the priests for a legal ruling: 'What's the law say about this?'
Here's a hypothetical for you: **READ v.12³**
To be 'holy' was to be pure and set apart, or consecrated, for specific sacred purposes
Some meats that were offered as sacrifices were allowed to be taken by the priests for food
So most of them had likely done just such a thing before, taking holy meat home
The fold of their garment being the equivalent of our pockets or shopping bags today
So: 'Suppose as you carry the meat, it brushes up against another food item—any food...
Does the holiness from the meat transmit or transfer over to the other food?'
The answer was: No! The meat can't convey its special status to other things
In short: holiness doesn't spread

However, there was something that *does* spread... **READ v.13⁴**
The law set out all kinds of stipulations about ritual purity, or cleanness
There were many things you might do or touch that made you 'unclean'
And before you could participate in worship or community life, you needed to be purified
One major contaminant was to touch a corpse

So, here's a second hypothetical: 'Suppose you hugged a deceased relative before their burial
So you're ceremonially unclean right now, and you haven't yet done the purification rites
What would happen to the same food items, if you touched them?' They'd also be defiled
So uncleanness, and unholiness, spreads

This is a condition we all share, as part of the human race
We are spiritually defiled... We are even spiritually dead, like a corpse
Which is bad news, as unholy sinners cannot ever come before a holy God and live
We, like God's people of old, are called and commanded to be holy, as God is holy
But true holiness comes from God... We can't just make holiness happen
Meanwhile, our evil spreads like flu germs... Infecting everything we touch
We've inherited this from our ancestors... Their sin polluted us since birth
Holiness is not transferrable by us, while impurity is tragically contagious

We see this principle at play all over the place: Dirt and filth spreads, cleanness does not...
Put one spoon of gasoline into a jug of water... Would you drink it? No, one drop pollutes it
But combine a pool full of drinking water with a jug of gas, and it doesn't make it drinkable
Or kids, if you touch a wall with dirty hands, you leave a dirty mark behind
But if you go and clean your hands, and re-touch the wall, do you now leave a clean mark? No
In the moral realm: One crime ruins a spotless record... But one good deed does not expunge it⁵

So how can we make our dirty lives clean?

Well, how would our world suggest we clean things up? Self-help!

Go to therapy. Join a program. Do this work out. Read this book. Take this pill.

Now, some of these can be really helpful things... But they don't make us clean

As Iain Duguid says: *"A huge industry has grown up around helping people put their dysfunctional lives together. It is not hard to see why: broken lives are painful and messy. God created the world to be a place where holiness and happiness went hand in hand; it is no surprise that unholiness and unhappiness are often found together."*

So then, if the world's solutions don't solve our unholiness, what about religion's solutions?

Don't miss a Sunday at church. Don't miss a day on your Bible reading plan.

Join this ministry. Read this book. Serve hard. Pray harder... Again: lots of good things

But if we are dead and defiled, no amount of activity on our part will improve our condition

That is Haggai's alarming point in v.14: **READ v.14⁶**

"So it is with [them] before me"—"in my sight", God says

He sees what we don't see... He looks on the heart... And what he sees isn't good

If the people themselves were defiled, then it didn't matter what else they tried to do for God

Their impurity would spread to *'every work of their hands'*

And even their most sacred efforts, offering sacrifices—

something prescribed by God in his Word!—would be unacceptable to God

Religion—even if it's true religion—cannot save... It cannot purify

It was like God was saying, 'Even once you have the temple rebuilt,

That impressive work won't matter at all if your sacrifices there remain unclean

We haven't dealt with the heart of the problem: your hearts... So first things first!

And what was true of them is true of us... Without the Lord's saving grace, we are unholy
We might not be rebuilding the temple—we have a temple in Christ, we are his temple
But as we work hard to rebuild whatever is in spiritual ruins in our lives,
The work itself doesn't purify us... Even our worship can't make us clean
Only repentance and faith can cleanse our hearts in God's sight:
Repentance, to make a clean break from our sins
And faith, to trust in the cleansing blood of our true sacrifice, Jesus Christ

It's fascinating, that when Jesus walked the earth, he was clearly different
Not only did he live a completely holy life, free from sin, so he could be a pure sacrifice
But it was also evident that holiness and cleanness flowed in the opposite direction
An unclean person would touch him, and instead of Jesus being defiled,
That person would be healed, cleansed, and forgiven

And the Bible tells us that now, in Christ, his holiness and perfect record *can* be transferred to us
Our sin was absorbed by him on the cross... Someone had to take our defilement
And now, when we have faith, we are justified, or declared righteous, in God's sight
Do we ever need this grace from God! We don't need self-help; we need Jesus!
Without him, we are dead and destined for judgment... But with him, it's all reversed

'But we don't deserve this!', you say... You're right: We never could deserve it
But that's precisely what grace is: undeserved favour
That's Haggai's whole point here: If his people were so unholy, grace is undeserved
And the more aware we are of our sin, the more affected we will be by God's grace

[tr] Haggai's people were at a turning point... They'd been unholy, but things were changing now
--Now that they had repented and turned back to the Lord
Resuming the rebuild of the temple was evidence of their repentance
But this too was not of themselves, it was the gift of God, lest no one should boast
See, God's grace is undeserved, for we are unholy... But God's grace is given to us anyway

God's grace is given anyway, in blight and in blessing (v.15-19)

[r] God's grace is given anyway, in blight and in blessing

In v.15, Haggai wants them to again consider—to give careful thought to this: **READ v.15-16a**⁷
So: 'Think back. Assess your current situation. Evaluate where you've been.'

'How *were* you faring before you began rebuilding?'

He says, '*Consider from this day onward*'—that's the first of 3 times he'll say that phrase

So here, it's 'From now on, keep looking back to how things used to be, before'—

Perhaps as a warning to not return to their sinful ways and the consequences they faced

Or as a reminder of how God was working on them, even then, while in their sin

Or as a contrast to how things will turn around in the future, inspiring gratitude

Or all of the above... God wanted them to look back... In order to see his grace most vividly

They were to consider where they'd come from, to be encouraged by what God called them to⁸

Yes, they'd gotten distracted and selfish and lazy—disobedient... And were judged for all this

But now, their hearts were changing... They had hope of God restoring as they yielded anew

There are two major ways God showed grace to them, and the first one is harder to accept:

It was actually in his discipline of them, as he sought to help them turn back to him
We wouldn't usually see this as grace, but it very much is
That God would care about us enough to warn us, plead with us, and discipline us
That God would even pay attention to us and turn us away from self-destruction... Grace!
Thus Haggai asked his people about how they fared before they began rebuilding: **READ v.16⁹**
In short, they'd been wildly unsuccessful... Their harvests kept badly disappointing
But then we discover the surprising source of these hardships... God says: **READ v.17¹⁰**
So this was no natural famine... God did not just passively allow these consequences
This was intentional, correctional discipline: God did the striking
In keeping with the covenant blessings and curses he had promised long ago

Why would God do this? We can infer he had the intent to turn his wayward people back to him
Which they, sadly, did not do: **READ v.17b¹¹**... God's discipline didn't faze them!
Their troubles should've brought them back to God, but they didn't
They refused to return... To pray... To repent... To obey... To rebuild
Like a dog with a shock collar repeatedly running at the line that keeps jolting him backward
Yet refusing to turn back toward home... That was God's people in Haggai's day
We see this today: Troubles or pain don't necessarily cause people to stop to consider their ways
And even if they do examine their lives in the middle of a crisis,
Turning to God or repenting of sin is not people's go-to response
People keep choosing the shock collar over the grace of correction

Allow me to ask you again: Is God trying to get your attention? Is he trying to get you to change?
Our jobs, our education, our houses, our possessions, our marriages, our relationships
All have a way of over-promising and under-delivering
Is it possible that the disappointments of life or the shattered expectations you've known
are hard graces from God, meant to draw you back to him?
Not all suffering is discipline, but some is... So pay attention! []

Next, Haggai wants them to consider how things were changing for the better: **READ v.18-19¹²**
So, ever since the very day they repented, God was changing their fortunes
They couldn't see it yet... That's what he meant here by the seed not yet being in the barn
They hadn't yet harvested their crops... Their plants had yielded nothing so far

But while they didn't yet have harvests in hand, they did have God's promise: **READ v.19b¹³**
And in that crazy little promise, they could rejoice... **READ v.19b¹⁴**
According to God, a bumper crop was on the way!
So think about it: God's discipline methods might sound shocking
And people's refusal to turn back to God was even more shocking
But most shocking of all was that, even after everything, God pours out his grace
'You were unclean and unholy... You were in need... You were being chastised...
And you didn't cry out to me... You didn't return... You refused to repent...
And yet: I will abundantly bless you!' ...That is sheer grace
There was grace in the blight... And there was grace in the blessing

'But from this day on...' ...'Things are different now... Count on it'

Brother and sister, can you relate to that? For in Christ, we are on this far side of blessing now
“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

In Jesus, we hear the reverberating echo of Haggai’s “From this day on I will bless you”:
“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight...” (Ephesians 1:3, 7-8)

We cannot rebuild our broken hearts and lives ourselves, earning God’s blessing

No, our transformation comes through God’s decisive work of grace

God has come to us in Jesus, to dwell with us, remove our evil, and restore us to his blessing

We respond by putting our trust in Jesus as our Saviour, and worshipping him

And it’s there, under God’s blessing, that we have opportunity to work and grow in holiness []

[tr] Alright, that brings us to Haggai’s final brief speech, coming on that same memorable day

It’s a mini sermon for Zerubbabel, meant to encourage him with (what else?) God’s grace

We’ve seen—looking to the past—that we don’t deserve God’s grace, for we are unholy

Then—standing in the present—we see that God’s grace has come to us anyway

And finally—peering ahead to the future—we’ll see that:

God’s grace will be present, even as justice comes (v.20-23)

[r] God’s grace will come even when the justice of his judgment comes for this world

[r] God’s grace will be present with us, even as justice comes

Look: **READ v.20-22¹⁵**... Whew! There’s some more earth-shaking glory for you

O come behold the works of God, the nations at his feet

The Message paraphrases God’s words here in a bit more modern language: “I am about to shake up everything, to turn everything upside down and start over from top to bottom—overthrow governments, destroy foreign powers, dismantle the world of weapons and armaments, throw armies into confusion, so that they end up killing one another.”

Haggai uses language reminiscent of past biblical accounts of God’s power and justice

In Genesis 19, he ‘overthrows’ Sodom and Gomorrah

In Deuteronomy 7, he talks about ‘destroying’ the pagan nations of Canaan

In Exodus 14, as the Israelites went through the Red Sea, he famously ‘overthrows the chariots and their riders’, sending Egypt’s elite troops ‘down’ into the sea

And in both Judges 7 and 1 Samuel 14, he confuses enemy armies into killing each other

So in the past, God had shown his power and judged the wicked, bringing justice and peace

God was and is able to save his people... And he promises that he will do so again

Don’t question what God has done for us lately... Cling to his promises!

The language Haggai uses here also makes it clear he’s talking about unbelieving nations

Which believers can take heart that we don’t ultimately belong to

However, we do still live in one of them []

Now, put yourself in Haggai’s people’s shoes... They had been exiled

into powerful Assyria and powerful Babylon, which was then conquered by powerful Persia

Their king was dethroned, their kingdom dissolved

They were left with extremely limited resources, political capital, or military strength

It'd have been very easy to question God's power or justice:

Where was God amidst all these powerful nations' warring and conquering?

You may feel similar today as the U.S., Russia, Iran, or others keep shaking up our world
Into these doubts and fears and weaknesses, Haggai speaks on behalf of God, like:

'I'm still sovereign... I haven't forsaken justice... Soon, I'll be the one shaking them up'

Iain Duguid comments: *"God will shake the heavens and the earth as we might shake a child's toy snow globe, sending everything topsy-turvy within the world. More precisely, though, God's shaking of the world will result not in its disordering but rather in the proper ordering of a world that is now out of joint."*

That's why, despite how scary these verses may sound, they were meant to be an encouragement

Right now, we live in a broken, unjust, dream-shattering, cosmically disordered world

Earlier in the service, we read Psalm 2 together

The first part of that psalm talks about the nations raging, peoples plotting, and kings and rulers standing against God

But then the psalm talks about the Lord sitting on his throne in heaven, laughing

Before promising to set up his own chosen King, overthrowing the nations by him

What this prophecy in Haggai tells us is that when we find ourselves living in part 1 of Psalm 2,

Part 2 still very much has a future¹⁶... God will yet establish his King and kingdom

With all nations under him, everything will be properly ordered again in shalom

Haggai may have been envisioning some short-term fulfillment of this

With Persia and other great nations rising and falling... None of them were eternal

But we believe there are aspects of this that couldn't have been fully fulfilled in the past,

And thus point ahead to a still-coming future day for us

When the Lord Jesus will return, conquer, judge, and reign

But on this day that Haggai spoke, 500 years before Christ came, there was hope even then

God was at work, and he had his hand on his people: **READ v.23¹⁷**

Do you see the grace? God says he has *chosen* Zerubbabel, by his own sovereign choice,

And that he will *take* him and *make* him like his own ring, on that soon-coming day

Even if Zerubbabel was a really great guy, this kind of honour is undeserved—grace

What's with the imagery of a signet ring? What *is* a signet ring, for that matter?

Well, a signet ring was a ring worn only by the ruler of a nation

It had their own special seal engraved on the stones or precious metals

So when a king wanted to endorse official documents or decrees,

he'd dip his ring in wax, and stamp his seal on them with his ring

Thus, the ring was a symbol for the royal authority and power he wielded

So when God told Zerubbabel he'd make him like his own signet ring, it was quite the statement

It was saying God would wear him like a ring, vesting his divine authority in him

This honour goes way beyond forgiveness... This is total restoration and blessing

I imagine Zerubbabel had to have felt small and insignificant in his day, in his world

His grandfather had once been king! But that kingdom was gone...

His family line had been demoted, big time... 'Governor' was a huge step down

That was only a very minor government official's role now
His people may've thought, 'Sure, God once had a plan for us... Now we're not so sure...
Our nation blew it... Our kings failed... We have been unfaithful...
Maybe God's given up on us... I wouldn't blame him if he did!'
In fact, the prophet Jeremiah almost seemed to suggest as much, in Jeremiah 22
Where the Lord spoke about Zerubbabel's grandfather, Jehoiakim
Saying that though he was like a signet ring on his hand,
he would tear him off and cast him away
The Lord's favour, authority, and protection were withdrawn from the throne
So how powerful it must've been for Zerubbabel to hear from the Lord:
'I'm putting the ring back on... And it's you!'
What his ancestors had lost, he was regaining... Or better said, he was re-receiving
The Lord's promise to Zerubbabel meant that God hadn't given up on his people after all
God's choice of David and his offspring hadn't ended for good
Despite all their great failures, God had even greater grace

"O Zerubbabel my servant, [I will] make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you..."
'My servant' was a special term God used for Abraham, Moses, and *especially* for David
That's no coincidence here, since Zerubbabel was David's rightful heir
God also says he had '*chosen*' Zerubbabel, obviously for a special role and task
There are many notions of a "chosen one" in modern culture and media and movies
Like when there is one person specially designated for greatness, or as a saviour
But they get the idea from the Bible, where it's used at times to refer to Moses, Israel, David...
And to Jesus! Zerubbabel is in incredible company!
For instance, listen to **Isaiah 42:1**, a prophecy about the Messiah: *"Behold my servant,
whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he
will bring forth justice to the nations."*

Zerubbabel is being encouraged that he stands in that line of chosen servants of God!

And speaking of standing in a line, let's begin wrapping up our time in Haggai by looking ahead
Skip forward about 15 pages in your Bibles, to find Matthew chapter 1
And look at v.12: *"And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the
father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the
father of Abiud, (and skip forward a handful of names, v.16:) and Jacob the father
of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."*
God promised Zerubbabel that he'd use him mightily in his own day to accomplish his purposes
And surely, it rekindled hope for the throne of David to eventually be re-established
But this was also a clue that God would use Zerubbabel's bloodline in even greater ways one day
His most faithful descendent would restore the cast-off Davidic line, model perfect zeal
for God's house, be the greater temple himself, be 'torn down' and 'rebuilt' in 3 days,
and shake the world for good with his death, resurrection, and ascension as King
Think about it: Zerubbabel's blood flows through the veins of the King
sitting not just on the throne of David but on the throne of the universe, right now

Even as God's justice rains down on nations, now or in the future, God's servants need not fear
Because on that day, he will have his chosen one set apart and sitting on the throne

His grace will be present even when the world falls apart around us
As Psalm 2 also predicted: God would install his King on his holy hill, Zion
Though on another hill, called Calvary, that anointed King looked cursed and abandoned
He more resembled Jehoiakim, utterly cast off, than Zerubbabel, the chosen one
Rulers stood nearby, scoffing, *“He saved others; let him save himself, if he is
the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”*¹⁸
God’s justice on sin rained down on his Servant and Son that day
But in so doing, he rained mercy and grace down on the rest of the human race
Shaking the earth and establishing his new world order, from that day on¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Jesus was indeed God’s ultimate Chosen One
Chosen and set apart for the special task of delivering God’s grace to unholy folks like us
As the Father declared: *“This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”* (Luke 9:35)
And if we are in Christ, we are also now his chosen ones, as precious as a ring on his hand
Ephesians 1:4 says *“...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we
should be holy and blameless before him.”*... Chosen... to be holy before him
So under this divine favour, let us earnestly seek to rebuild anything lying in ruins in our lives
He first loved us, giving us grace beyond belief
So may we keep him first, and give all the glory back to him, from this day on

PRAY

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet,

² “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests about the law:

³ ‘If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?’” The priests answered and said, “No.”

⁴ Then Haggai said, “If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?” The priests answered and said, “It does become unclean.”

⁵ HT Duguid

⁶ Then Haggai answered and said, “So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean.

⁷ Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare?

⁸ HT Fries

⁹ How did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

¹⁰ I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord.

¹¹ yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord.

¹² Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider: Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you.”

¹³ But from this day on I will bless you.”

¹⁴ But from this day on I will bless you.”

¹⁵ The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother.

¹⁶ HT Duguid

¹⁷ On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.”

¹⁸ Luke 23:35

¹⁹ HT Duguid